

chapter eleven

A few final words

Books, videotapes, schools, and clinics can't provide you with pat answers to solving your livestock handling problems. They can only guide you in the right direction and let you know what is possible to achieve.

Many people are satisfied with solving handling symptoms. The information in this book will help you solve **the cause** of these symptoms.

The problems you experience often aren't problems. Adopt good handling skills and you won't have 'em.

The single biggest problem people have with adopting good handling is believing the principles and traits about cattle, how important it is to them, and how important it is to accommodate them all the time when you're handling them.

Accommodating the nature of cattle 100 percent of the time isn't always easy to do. Constant watching, thinking, and adapting while handling can be a challenge—especially when it's too hot or cold and you're hungry and tired. But stock don't do annoying things to aggravate us, and they don't operate on our timetable.

Done right, good handling will achieve what both you and the stock want. But until it becomes second nature, it will seem contrary to how you “want” to get it done.

It takes time to show the stock you aren't going to be aggressive and will go with them when they are scared, but it shortens the handling time required compared to traditional methods. It gets the job done right. And done right means you don't have to do it again. It makes things that are impossible with traditional handling not only possible, but readily done. Like a trained horse, well-handled stock will really work for you.

If you handle stock well when things are going well and switch to high stress in the tough spots, don't tell your friends you tried it and it didn't work. Stockmanship, like horsemanship, has to become a way of operating around cattle all the time. You don't have to do it all perfectly and you don't have to have all the skill and knowledge of Bud Williams to drive herds well, sort well, and place cattle consistently. Do it as best you can, but do it. Dedicate yourself to the welfare of your cattle, and you'll see some amazing things happen.

A few final words

Everyone on your ranch who is handling your cattle on the range should be on board with good handling.

Ranchers may hire help with little knowledge of stockmanship or little care for the cattle and then put them with a rider that does. Some handlers do things fairly well, while others undo it. This is a great way to frustrate good riders. Good riders are in high demand, so they quit.

Handling stock low stress one day and high stress the next, is also hard on the animals. Take the time to collaborate with your ranch staff and set a sound goal for what you want to achieve. Don't do anything that doesn't keep you headed in that direction.

The practice of good livestock handling methods have the potential for you to gain remarkable control over all your animals, save time, and reduce the stress that typical handling methods impose.

Go out there with an open-mind and believe it just long enough to see the animals change. Stay with it and improve steadily. Just let go and trust that your animals will turn over remarkable control to you if you do the right things.

Keep in mind that you need to accommodate the way cattle think and react. If they aren't doing what you want, it's because they aren't able to or you're asking wrong.

Being a good rider and manager out on the range is a highly skilled profession. Don't expect to be 100 percent successful at having the stock stay where you put them every time, load into trailers or sort perfectly the first year.

Success with this method requires developing a feel for the stock, perfecting your timing, and realizing how to adjust as you read the stock. It takes a while to understand what this all means. Only the cattle can teach you how to handle them right.

The one key secret to all this is calmness: Calmness before you ask them to work, calmness during and after. There really is very little else involved in winning with cattle. Controlling cattle is easy once you get calmness in yourself and a little surety in moving right.

The changes you achieve when you are at the core of transforming yourself are the last things you'll obtain but the first things you'll need. Don't ever give up on this. There is no other practical way to achieve this degree of control over stock.

You will undoubtedly have problems and difficulties from time to time. When you're out there really stuck on a problem, sometimes the best thing to do is to go do something else for a time. After you relax yourself a bit, go back and ask the stock to do something different, maybe something easy. Then go back to what you were trying to do.

There have been times I've trailed sensitive bunches of cattle (I usually get to handle the rotten ones) and towards day's end got to thinking about dusting off and getting a decent meal. A person can get in a hurry, and horses are happy to hurry up the drive.

The stock would start to show some unease, so I would stop the herd someplace. I put the watch in the saddle bag, laid on the grass by a creek (when I could find one), and let the horse graze. When I went back to the herd with a reminder that I could be processing government forms back at the office, then it all went better from that point.

Funny how my resting at the creek solved the cows' problem about staying on the trail.

Whenever cows do things that used to annoy you, when you can say "she's just being a cow," and can genuinely think "I should have done this or that instead," then you're making progress. You will win from then on.

Call us and ask questions if you need to. Help is available at the Natural Resources Conservation Service field office and Butte Soil and Water Conservation District in Arco, Idaho.

